

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-14 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 DRC-01 OMB-01 /127 W

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R 080940Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4097

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC

COMUSSAG

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 13662

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CB

SUBJECT: SOCIO-REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP CHALLENGED

REF: PHNOM PENH 11952

SUMMARY: REMOVAL OF THE CHECKS WHICH THE UNGA THREAT PLACED ON DISRUPTIVE POLITICAL ACTIVITY HAS UNLEASHED AN EFFORT ON THE PART OF YOUNGER SOCIO-REPUBLICAN DEPUTIES TO CHANGE THE PARTY LEADERSHIP AND, IN TIME, TO SHARE IN CABINET PORTFOLIOS. PRESIDENT LON NOL HAS REACTED TO THESE PRESSURES BY ORDERING THAT A PARTY CONGRESS BE HELD IN JANUARY 1974 TO ELECT A NEW CENTRAL COMMITTEE. END SUMMARY.

2. DEPUTY THACH THOAN, WHO TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS ON DECEMBER 7 THAT HIS ULTIMATE AIM IS TO REPLACE THE COUNTRY'S LEADERSHIP INCLUDING THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL WITH YOUNGER MEN, CLAIMS TO BE ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL INSTIGATORS OF THE CHALLENGE. AN ENGERETIC, VOCIFEROUS, AMBITIOUS AND CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE, THACH THOAN HAS BEEN UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO ELABORATE ON THE GOALS OF THE

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CHALLENGERS BEYOND THIS GENERAL DESIRE FOR CHANGE (SEE

REFTEL).

3. SOCIO-REPUBLICAN SECRETARY GENERAL AND FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HANG THUN HAK CONFIRMED TO US YESTERDAY (DECEMBER 8) THAT HIS LEADERSHIP IS UNDER ATTACK AND NOTED THAT HE HAD RECEIVED A WRITTEN INSTRUCTION FROM THE MARSHAL TO CONVENE A PARTY CONGRESS IN EARLY JANUARY. HAK SAID THAT HIS DETRACTORS INCLUDE NOT ONLY THACH THOAN BUT DEPUTIES THACK SUYEM AND UNG SIKHUN, BOTH OF WHOM HAVE TIES TO THE PRESIDENT'S BROTHER BG LON NON. NOTING THAT HE IS BEING ACCUSED OF BEING TOO SOFT TOWARDS THE SIRIK MATAK AND IN TAM GROUPS PARTICIPATING IN THE CABINET, HAK SAID HE BELIEVES LON NON TO HAVE ORIGINATED THE CHALLENGE IN ORDER TO REGAIN A ROLE IN THE GOVERNMENT.

4. WHILE ACCEPTING THE MARSHAL'S ORDER TO CONVENE A PARTY CONGRESS, HAK NOTES THAT HE HAS NOT AGREED TO PROPOSED PROCEDURES FOR CHOOSING THE DELEGATES TO THIS CONGRESS. HAK INDICATED THAT HIS CHALLENGERS HOPE TO STACK THE CONGRESS WITH THEIR PHNOM PENH SUPPORTERS WHILE HE IS HOLDING OUT FOR HIGHER PROVINCIAL REPRESENTATION. (UNG SIKHUM, WHOM OTHER SOURCES HAVE DESCRIBED AS A WOULD-BE LON NON, HAS BEEN ACTIVELY ATTEMPTING TO TURN THE CITY'S PARTY ORGANIZATION INTO HIS PERSONAL MACHINE, WE UNDERSTAND). HAK INDICATED THAT HE WILL ATTEMPT TO NEGOTIATE AN ARRANGEMENT BY WHICH NEW BLOOD WILL BE BROUGHT INTO THE SOCIO-REPUBLICAN CENTRAL COMMITTEE WITHOUT UPSETTING THE TOP LEADERSHIP OR ITS POLICY OF SUPPORTING THE COALITION GOVERNMENT.

5. COMMENT: WHILE WE DO NOT TOTALLY DISCOUNT HAK'S BELIEF THAT LON NON IS BEHIND THE NEW CHALLENGE, WE BELIEVE THAT THE AMBITIONS OF A DIVERSE LOT OF YOUNG SOCIO-REPUBLICANS ARE INVOLVED. DISPARITY IN THEIR AIMS SHOULD GIVE HAK GOOD ROOM FOR MANEUVER.
ENDERS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL PARTIES, POLITICAL LEADERS, PARTY MEETINGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 DEC 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: elyme
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973PHNOM13662
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: PHNOM PENH
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19731236/aaaabael.tel
Line Count: 97
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: PHNOM PENH 11952
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: elyme
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 NOV 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20-Nov-2001 by shawdg>; APPROVED <04-Jan-2002 by elyme>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOCIO-REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP CHALLENGED
TAGS: PINT, CB
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005